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MEC launches life changing initiative

By Musa Mnyandu

Hundreds of women from across Ilembe District and beyond have welcomed the decision by KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison Siphon Hlomuka to improve incentives for the participants of the Zibambele Road Maintenance Programme.

MEC Hlomuka announced measures to ramp up the programme at an event held at the Thembeni Sports Ground in KwaDukuza Ward 12, on Thursday last week. Hlomuka was joined at the event by Ilembe District Mayor Thobani Shandu, KwaDukuza Mayor Lindile Nhaca, Mandeni Mayor Thabani Mdlalose, and Ndwedwe Mayor Samuel Mfeka.

The programme is aimed at alleviating poverty amongst women, in line with government's Extended Public Work Programme (EPWP), a broader job creation programme spearheaded by the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government.

Speaking at the event, MEC Hlomuka said the gathering had brought together approximately 3000 women from various parts of KwaZulu-Natal. He said his department had invited all the participants in the Zibambele programme in order to show

its appreciation for their role in road maintenance.

"We want to urge those participants who are not showing full commitment to the programme to please pull up their socks. Those who are dedicated to their jobs, we want to say thank you.

"This programme dates back to the era of Mr. Sbu Ndebele, during which time participants were working eight days (a

month) and getting paid a stipend of R350. Today participants are still expected to work eight days, but now their stipend has risen to R1000, and we have made an undertaking to keep increasing their pay as and when budget becomes available.

"The programme currently employs over 39 000 women across the province, but we are not going to stop there, as we plan on adding the numbers as part of our quest to

alleviate poverty.

One of the programme participants, Mrs. Thembeni Mbonambi, expressed her excitement to be part of the programme, adding that Zibambele had enabled her and her colleagues to learn new skills, thus helping to improve their lives.

Ilembe District Mayor Thobani Shandu thanked MEC Hlomuka for choosing the district to launch the new, improved phase of the programme, adding that the programme was helping to put food on the table for many vulnerable households.

"It was in 1999, under the stewardship of Comrade Sibusiso Ndebele, that the Department of Transport in our province piloted this important programme, which saw an

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MEC Siphon Hlomuka is seen addressing the participants of the Zibambele programme

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“We have learnt new skills and improved our lives”

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unprecedented 2,700 beneficiaries being awarded Zibambele contracts as part of its Road to Wealth and Job Creation initiative. These opportunities have multiplied significantly over the years, benefiting tens of thousands under the ANC government, highlighting the important role that road infrastructure plays in placing the rural economy on a growth path that absorbs labour,” said Shandu.

Fighting poverty

Mayor Shandu also thanked

MEC Hlomuka for being exemplary in delivering on the promises of the governing party and fighting inequality, poverty, and unemployment head-on.

“We are motivated by the programmes we see you implementing, which include expanding investment in road infrastructure to improve community access to basic services and increase the overall efficiency and competitiveness of the economy; prioritising youth employment across all areas of intervention so that we can ensure productive opportunities for black people, women, and young people in

particular; as well as improving support for SMMEs and cooperatives in the transport sector,” Shandu said.

KwaDukuza Mayor Lindile Nhaca hailed the Zibambele programme as an important intervention at a time when the country was facing an increasingly tough economic climate.

“The year 2024 presents an opportunity to reflect on our progress as a government that has been able to deliver to its people with so much strides and under severe socio-economic challenges over the past thirty years,” Mayor Nhaca stated.